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ABSTRACT

This paper examines culturally relevant teacher education for First Nations undergraduate students, offered by the Department of Indian Education at the University of Regina-affiliated Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. As graduates may want to challenge dominant epistemologies of the schools in which they teach, the program responds to students' needs for connection to traditional cultural knowledge in order to overcome personal and cultural dislocation and racism. All students take classes in Indian languages, studies, and art. In a class affirming cultural identity, Elders are used as teachers in an outdoor education setting that includes ceremonies, traditional activities, and storytelling. Tools to deconstruct racist ideology and practices are given in a third-year class in human justice that focuses on institutional racism, particularly on an analysis of curriculum. The concepts of race, text, identity, stereotyping, bias, and ethnocentrism are used to analyze the impact of curriculum materials on First Nations children. In addition to curriculum materials analysis, students also analyze images of First Nations people portrayed in the mass media. The classes model pedagogical methods of dealing with racism and critical thinking. Barriers to connecting preservice teachers with cultural knowledge and anti-racist education practice include lack of culturally appropriate materials, school and community resistance to change, and needs for personal and professional coping strategies. (Contains 18 references.) (SAS)

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CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHER EDUCATION:

A SASKATCHEWAN FIRST NATIONS CASE

Paper presented at the

American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines culturally relevant teacher education programming for First Nations undergraduate students offered by the Department of Indian Education at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. Being a federated college with the University of Regina gives our department the ability to create our own classes and programs to meet the unique needs of our preservice First Nations students. It is our goal that our students and graduates will challenge the dominant epistemologies of the schools in which they teach. This paper describes how our Department strives to meet that goal by responding to the students' need for connection to traditional cultural knowledge in order to overcome the personal and cultural dislocation resulting from past and present racist structures and practices. Cultural knowledge is combined with analysis of racism, and in particular institutional racism, so that our graduates have an awareness of the reproduction of racism through curriculum and other school policies and practices and have the professional skills to begin to challenge racist ideology.

Our department attends to the above issues in various ways throughout the four year degree program such as requiring all students to take classes in Indian languages, Indian studies and Indian art. These classes introduce students to transformative knowledge (Banks, 1996) so students are exposed to concepts and theories that challenge their previous school knowledge and begins to affirm their personal/cultural knowledge. This process continues in students' education classes. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on two classes that were developed by our Department to meet the specific needs of our students. The main topics dealt with in these classes are the affirmation of identity through traditional cultural knowledge and the critical analysis of racism including the reflection of current teaching practices utilized by self and others.

AFFIRMING CULTURAL IDENTITY

> If you don't tell your children who and what they are, the won't know. How can they be proud of what they don't know?
>
> Salish Elder, 1980

One cannot ignore the impact of past racism on First Nations students. The effects of historical and continuing societal, institutional and personal racism imposed by the upon First Nations peoples by the settler societies has been documented by many Aboriginal authors (Acoose, 1995; Adams, 1989; Campbell, 1973; Means, 1995). Racism has taken its toll on the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual life of First Nations peoples. It is testament to the enduring spirit of survival of First Nations peoples that they always have been and continue to be active participants in the resistance against the imposition of oppression by the settler societies (Adams, 1989; Haig-Brown, 1988).

Schooling has especially had serious impact in the disruption of intergenerational connections (Grant, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988) needed for cultural retention and renewal. Residential schools with their isolation and imposition of a foreign language, culture and ideology were especially damaging

causing the disruption of cultural continuity leaving individuals without a sense of who they were in the world. Acoose (1995) expresses these feelings as she states "I was overwhelmed with negative feelings and confused because my own way of seeing, being, knowing and understanding the world...had continuously been assaulted by the canadian (sic) nation's ideological forces...I began to clearly understand the importance of reconnecting to the collective consciousness of my...ancestors" (pp. 19-20).

One of the ways our program seeks to reconnect students to the knowledge of their ancestors is by including Elders as teachers. The class in which this is done most intensively is an outdoor education class on learning from the land and the Elders where students, instructors and Elders come together in a camp setting to engage in ceremonies, traditional activities and storytelling by the Elders. Inherent in the cultural activities and stories are the language, values and ideology of First Nations peoples. In addition to the cultural knowledge, Elders share the history of First Nations peoples in their accounts of their own and previous generations struggle for social justice. For example Elder Clara Pasqua tells of women from her reserve blockading a highway to get money for education. Elder Stanley Pasqua tells of his struggle as Chief to get compensation for flooding of reserve land, while Elder Willie Peigan describes how ceremonies were kept alive in a time when they were declared illegal by the settler state. These and others accounts by the Elders have impact on the students in that they see their peoples as strong, capable people engaged in the struggle for social justice.

Teaching by the Elders is not only important for the information they provide but also by the way in which they do the teaching. "Traditional wisdom is both content and process. It speaks of how things should be done as well as what should be done...The North American intellectual tradition is, for the most part, an oral one. This means that the transmission of knowledge is an interpersonal and, often, intergenerational process...Oral societies depend on cultural memory. Elders link the coming generations with the teachings of past generations. The cultural teachings are the foundation of the Aboriginal peoples identity" (RCAP, Vol. 4, p. 116-117). The importance of this link is reflected in the language. In Cree the root words of grandchild "aniskotapan" are anis which means connectedness and otape which is to pull or carry, so the literal translation of grandchild is that who is connected and pulled or carried along (Goulet, 1998). The Elders make that connection with the students. Laughter is common place in the camp setting as Elders use teasing and humour as an integral part of their interactions intertwined with topics dealing with very serious matters and lectures on the importance of traditional belief structures. When students reflect upon their learning with the Elders, they often describe a sense of being centred and a feeling of wholeness. By making connections to the students cultural past, the Elders pull the students out of the coercion of past educational, institutional and internalized racism. "To know your own history, your own roots, and your identity is inherently liberating." (Goulet, Lavalee & McLeod, in press, p. 8). Students develop the pride and strength needed for

their own struggles for social justice as educators and in others aspects of their lives as First Nations peoples.

CHALLENGING RACISM

To be effective in the struggle as educators, students need to be given the tools to deconstruct the racist ideology and practices of the schools in which they will be teachers and develop professional practice to counteract the prevailing ideology of racism. In the third year of the program, students take a human justice class dealing with racism. Although students are introduced to the different forms of societal, institutional and personal racism, the focus of the class is on institutional racism particularly on an analysis of curriculum.

Our program specializes in preparing teachers to teach First Nations pupils. The goals of curriculum for First Nations peoples in Canada were articulated over twenty years ago by the National Indian Brotherhood when they outlined the framework for Indian control of Indian education. First Nations peoples needed to be represented in the curriculum. "Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being." (NIB, 1972, p. 9). Unfortunately school curricula still has not fulfilled this goal 20 years later. Instead, the curriculum continues to reflect the dominate ideology of settler society.

However just because most of the students in our program are Aboriginal, it does not mean they automatically recognize the problems with the curriculum. They have a sense that their peoples are not fairly represented but need the tools of critical analysis. Mainstream academic knowledge which guides the development of curriculum materials for schools seldom recognizes or identifies the inherent bias, assumptions perspectives and points of view that have victimized people of colour (Banks, 1996). In schools First Nations students are exposed to curriculum material that fosters attitudes about their people based upon unrealistic and derogatory images. In discussing literature, Acoose (1995) emphasizes the need for students to approach literature critically since to her literature is a powerful and political tool. Unless students learn how to analyze the literature they are reading they accept the negative images as portrayed which serves to maintain the status quo.

Pinar (1993) discusses the problems of the present curriculum and views it as a racist text representing the national identity with its selective memory loss of the racist history of the States. Curriculum debates are debates couched in the ideology of superiority. "Curriculum debates about what we teach the young are, in addition to being debates about what knowledge is of most worth, debates about who we perceive ourselves to be and how we will represent that identity, including what remains as 'left over,' as 'difference.' To think about curriculum in this way I rely on three interrelated concepts: race, text, and identity." (p. 60). We use these concepts in the class as we analyze the text (which includes illustrations) of curriculum materials keeping in mind the

representation of First Nations peoples and impact of that representation on the identity of First Nations and other children.

Included in the framework used to analyze curriculum are three main concepts: stereotyping, bias and ethnocentrism. Stereotyping is the overuse, overgeneralization and trivialization of cultural symbols. It is the problem most commonly found in material for young children but occurs at higher levels such as comic books and logo for sports teams. Bias is the inclination to favour one perspective (settler) over another (First Nations) in the curriculum and takes many forms (Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1977). The most common form is bias by omission where First Nations peoples simply do not exist in the text. Many other forms are evident (such as bias by defamation that calls attention to the faults of people) that belittle the knowledge and skills of First Nations peoples. Ethnocentrism is more prevalent in materials for higher grades. Preiswerk (1981) views ethnocentrism as the righteousness of the progress of "civilization" over those "less civilized." Ethnocentrism is the glorification of Western, European knowledge, history, and contributions to modern day society to the exclusion of all other.

The analysis of curriculum as racial text is important not just to change students understanding of curriculum but also of their teaching practice. Often without intervention, student teachers tend to reproduce the status quo. First Nations teachers quickly understand the importance of the inclusion of First Nations peoples in the curriculum. However they like other teachers will tend to use material that is readily available. Often this material is stereotypical and represents First Nations people only as they lived in the past. This is a common problem in multicultural education where despite substantive examples of multicultural teaching practice, many teachers "still revert to superficial renditions of cultural differences and teach cultures as habits and customs frozen in the past" (Sleeter, 1996, p. 145). It has also been a problem in Indian schools as well. Even though they are staffed with Indian teachers unless there is a change in the curriculum the ideology remains the same. As Young (1997) explains, "aside from some cosmetic alterations like the inclusion of beadwork, traditional dance, basket weaving and some language classes, the curriculum taught in Indian schools remained exactly the same, teaching the same conclusions, indoctrinating children with exactly the same values as when the schools were staffed entirely by white people" (quoted in Almeida, p. 768),

In class as we discuss the different forms of racism in materials, students are presented with and challenged to research those materials that can counteract the invalid representation of First Nations peoples. To counteract stereotyping, students are introduced to and challenged to find materials with culturally accurate, realistic, contemporary images of First Nations people. Bias in text needs to be balanced with a variety of First Nations' perspectives represented in the stories of the Elders and the books by contemporary First Nations authors. Ethnocentric text is countered by using the books and materials that document the contributions of First Nations peoples to the North American society as we know it today as well as those that present First Nations

philosophies as not only being relevant today but crucial to society's progress into the future.

In addition to the need to analysis curriculum material, students also analyze the images of First Nations peoples portrayed in the mass media because children bring the knowledge of popular culture to school with them. Bartolome and Mecdo (1997) believe it to be essential for educators to analyze the ideology of the mass media because "mass media educate more people about issues regarding ethnicity and race that all other source of education available" (p. 223). Hollywood movies, television, video games and the Internet cannot be ignored by teachers. They are very much a part of the world of children.

Along with the analysis of materials is the need to examine pedagogy. Racism is a hard issue to deal with and an emotional one for First Nations students. Methods are modeled where students not only debate and critique interpretations in class discussions and small group work, but also support one another emotionally through shared experiences and talking circles. Methods of teaching children to be aware of racism and critical of materials are explored which students then apply with pupils in their school practicum. In referring to school practices, Banks (1996) advocates that teachers need to help students become critical thinkers. We hope that our students can do that and more. We want our students to become teachers who use their classrooms to dismantle institutional racism. We hope each students comes to regard her/himself as "decision maker and generator of knowledge, perspective, and theories, and, like her students, as an active agent in her own learning, using the classroom as a site for inquiry and continuously interrogating her own and others' assumptions" (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 543).

CONCLUSION

We feel we have made a beginning in connecting the need for cultural knowledge and anti-racist practice in our program with our graduates bringing positive, contemporary images of First Nations peoples into their teaching. Barriers still remain. Quality materials from a First Nations perspective are not as readily available as others. In some schools the administration or the school board or the community is not supportive of curriculum and pedagogical change. In our program we need to encourage and model teaching as critical inquiry that challenges taken for granted assumptions about knowledge. Our students sense the vulnerability that occurs when the status quo is challenged. We need to better prepare students with both personal and professional coping strategies in dealing with racism. But we have started. Examining the "prevailing ideology in textbooks [that] encourages [Indigenous] readers to feel shame rather than pride, to feel disconnected rather than connected, and to feel strange rather than normal" (Acoose, 1995, p. 29) is not easy for our students, but as many students have stated at the end of the class, it is a healing experience, which combined with the exposure to cultural knowledge of their peoples, gives them the strength needed to go forward.

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